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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

It's been a long week! It started off poorly when I got a call from my weekend 3rd shift person. Her kids were sick and she couldn't work that night. Naturally, she called that night, leaving me little time to find coverage. I ended up going in. Not the way to start the week.

So now my normal routine is all out of kilter! I'm still trying to get myself straightened out. This is Friday, right?

What a week for news, or the lack of it! It's been really quiet this week! Hey, how about California and no energy! So much for de-regulation! Silicon Valley, brought to its knees in the worst possible way: no electricity! What irony!

All we hear about these days is dot-com this and dot-com that, one failing right after another. Gee, think the dot-com craze has finally petered-out? This may be the internet age, but everyone tried to cash in too quickly and now they're quickly being whittled down to nothing. Wow, start a business at 18, a millionaire at 19, and bankrupt at 20! It's the American way, folks!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I've got good news, and I've got bad news.... depending on your point of view. The news server I use for this column is down. Therefore I can't grab the posts that you should be reading here.

So instead of the usual question-and-answer thing, I want to step up on my soapbox for a bit and talk about something that I've been thinking about lately.

Don't worry. It's not religion or politics (per se), but perception itself.

Have you ever noticed that sometimes no matter how clear and sensible a

position seems to you, someone else thinks it's the most stupid idea in the world? Of course, the same happens in reverse too, doesn't it? We've all been there... someone at a party brings up a topic and you are interested until you hear their position, which you think is just plain wrong. It's so wrong, in fact, that you don't even bother running down in your mind WHY it's wrong.

I've come to the conclusion that it's a matter of perception. Your point of view IS your reality. Of course, that's just my perception.
<grin>

Let's face it. Most of us are intelligent enough to, if not understand another point of view, at least understand that there IS another possible point of view. Although we're intelligent enough to have that 'eureka moment', we normally don't. I'm not even talking about the "my God could beat up your God" kind of argument. I'm talking about simple stuff like "four quarters are better than ten dimes" kind of things.

Besides our intellects, our perceptions are all we have. We've made the mistake of thinking HOW we perceive things is WHAT we are perceiving. And that's just not the case. That's why magicians can beguile us for hours, and it may even be why hypnosis works on the subconscious mind. We simply take it for granted that 'what we see is what we get' and often (more often than we think) it just ain't so. We like to think that we are in control of what we do and what happens around us and that, if we just know enough and pay enough attention, we'll come out okay.

That view was the rule of the day during the Victorian era. Remember Sherlock Holmes? Any mystery could be solved if only you paid enough attention to what was going on. That may also explain why Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a success as a writer and, ummmm... much less so as a doctor. As an author he could control events, but not as a physician.

This Victorian ethic contributed in large part to the Titanic disaster. The HMS TITANIC was a jewel in the crown of the engineering community. "Even God couldn't sink this ship" was the mindset, and therefore lifeboats weren't a major concern, and we could cruise the sea as we pleased without fear. Nature herself wouldn't dare to intrude into this brave new world of science and propriety. Yes, it was only proper that, at the height of civilization and culture, the unsinkable ship had been produced.

Unfortunately, old Mother Nature had other ideas. She put her foot down... and we just happened to be under it.

Max Planck and Neils Bohr shook the world with their theories of quantum mechanics. No longer was it possible to look at everything as a cold, hard equation with a definite outcome. Strange entities existed one moment and did not exist the next. Particles could mutate into others and some properties could never be observed no matter how much we knew or how carefully we paid attention. The Victorian picture of the universe was wrong.

Now, about a hundred years later, we've become a bit more sophisticated in our beliefs about our control of our surroundings. Faced with the fact that there are some things that we simply can't control, we've become a society of litigators. If something doesn't work out the way it 'should', our first impulse is to argue and bully the powers that be into submission... to make the Universe see that we are right, or

failing that, to deny either the possibility of an outcome or the validity of it all together. We simply can't see another point of view.

I tend to be that way when it comes to computer operating systems. I simply can't understand how anyone could enjoy using Windows. TOS variants (TOS 3.0x or MagiC) are my first choice, followed by Linux. People simply CAN'T enjoy Windows, therefore they must be just plain wrong.

Of course intellectually I understand that it's possible to enjoy using Windows but, deep down in my soul, Sherlock Holmes hides behind the shadow of the Titanic and whispers, "You have only to observe clearly to see the truth of the situation. There can only be one correct answer."

Well, all I can say is, "Come, Watson. The game is afoot!"

I'm sorry for this departure from the normal format, but please tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->From the Editor's Controller    -   Playin' it like it is!
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I haven't had a lot to say in this column for ages, but I just thought I'd say a few words this week and update you on the eGames issue that was brought forth in these pages a few months back. If you remember, ex-Atari and all-around good guy Don Thomas related a problem with eGames, a software publisher. The issue was that eGames portrayed their software compilations as complete games - when that was simply not true once you bought the software and played many of the games.

In his story, Don told us how he traded correspondence with eGames and was essentially told: "too bad". The story got around to various gaming magazines, complaints to the Better Business Bureau, and an e-mail campaign to eGames ensued. And the story died down.

Well, earlier in the week, I received an e-mail from Don which I have copied later on in this section. The crux of the message was that yes, you can fight City Hall, and win. I'll let you be the judge of what has transpired. Good goin', Don!

Until next time...

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

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Gear Up for Racing Realism in 'Metropolis  
Street Racer' for Sega Dreamcast

Ultra-Realistic Racing Game Lets Players Speed  
Through Cityscapes Around the World with New Point  
System Based on Racing Flair

Grab the wheel and cruise into 2001 in style with Sega of America's 'Metropolis Street Racer' for the 128-bit, Internet-ready Dreamcast video game console. Burn luxury car rubber through ultra-real cityscapes in San Francisco, Tokyo and London in this high-speed racing game with a totally innovative point system. The goal of MSR is to accumulate 'Kudos' for driving skill, speed and style. 'MSR' was rated among TV Guide's 'Best of the Best' in the Racing category and was given 5 out of 5 stars by Next Generation magazine. 'MSR' is available at retail stores nationwide this month.

'MSR' is a unique test of skill, style and precision, with an ever-expanding series of exciting driving challenges. 'Kudos' can be earned for Speed (winning a race or beating the clock), Style (doing 'clean' laps or power-slides) or Skill (setting personal goals to beat). As an added challenge, players will lose 'Kudos' for Bad Driving (crashing); Unfair Advantage (using other cars or barriers to gain position) or Car Swaps (although legal, this costs players a trade-in penalty).

'Sega's 40-year videogame heritage is rich with hit racing titles such as 'Hang On,' the 'Daytona' racing series and 'Sega Rally,'" said Gwen Marker, marketing communication manager, Sega of America. 'Sega is bringing racing to a new level once again with the release of 'MSR,' with hot new features such as the revolutionary new point system, customizable driving music and an Internet ranking option, a first for console racing games."

Players can choose from 40 different luxury cars from worldwide manufacturers such as Mercedes, Toyota, Renault, Rover, Mitsubishi, Alpha Romeo and Peugeot. 'Metropolis Street Racer' offers players the choice of more than 250 different routes in cities so accurately recreated that players will recognize real land marks like Big Ben and Fisherman's Warf. More than 40,000 photographs and 40 hours of video footage were used to create 20 square miles of scenery for players to check out while tearing up the pavement.

'Metropolis Street Racer' features 'Real World Time,' which uses the current time set to a players' Visual Memory Unit (VMU) to accurately reflect the real time zones in the cities in which they race. In addition, changing weather conditions challenge racers to adapt to changes in car

physics and road-handling dynamics.

'MSR' players can groove to different radio stations in each location. The airwaves in Tokyo feature 'Tokyo 1,' 'J Mix' and 'Yamote Broadcasting;' London stations include 'West Central 1,' 'The Underground' and 'Capital Jazz;' and San Franciscans tap toes to 'K Vibe,' 'Rock 101' and 'The Roadhouse.' Players can also customize their driving soundtrack by choosing different songs and saving them on their VMU.

After the race, players can hit the Internet to see how they fared in online leagues against racers from around the globe.

'Metropolis Street Racer' is available in retail stores nationwide and at [www.sega.com](http://www.sega.com) at a suggested retail price of \$39.95. 'Metropolis Street Racer' is rated 'E' for Everyone.

## Playcycle Launches the Next Generation Video Game Exchange

### "New Site Gives Gamers an Exclusive Trading Venue"

Playcycle, Inc. launches <http://www.playcycle.com/>, a web-based exchange designed exclusively for the video game community.

Dedicated to gamers, Playcycle gives enthusiasts the greatest flexibility when they are looking to buy or sell video games, consoles, and accessories. The overall secondary video game market is valued at \$1.3 billion.

At last, gamers can:

- \*Tell the community what they want to buy, as well as what they have to sell
- \*Choose from fixed price, negotiable price, auction, or reverse auction formats
- \*Find exactly the games they want, then compare and track them quickly and easily
- \*See the entire market in real time across gaming platforms and transaction formats

At Playcycle, Members can post Seeks and Offers for the new and used video games, consoles and accessories they want to buy and sell - posting and membership is free. The owner of the listing is billed only \$1 in the event of a successful transaction, and there are no other required fees.

From the beginning, the Playcycle team worked with video gaming enthusiasts across the country to create a site that fulfills the needs of one of this nation's fastest growing communities.

Michael Thomasson, of Good Deal Games (Lexington, Ky.), a renowned online game dealer, was so impressed that he has made Playcycle the premier outlet for two newly published Sega CD games, Star Strike and Bug Blasters: The Exterminators, for which he has recently secured publishing and distribution rights.

"The uncomplicated fee structure and unique interface will draw gaming enthusiasts and dealers alike" Mr. Thomasson said, "And since the site

is dedicated only to video games, Playcycle can assess and respond to the ongoing needs of this close-knit community, as they did when building the site."

The Playcycle team will continue to improve <http://www.playcycle.com/> in the months ahead, adding newly requested functionality and content. Playcycle is "All Games All The Time!"

Take-Two Interactive's Rockstar Games Proudly  
Announces the Approval of Oni for the PlayStation2

Rockstar Games, Take Two Interactive Software, Inc.'s high end video game publishing division, is pleased to announce the approval of Oni, the highly anticipated 3rd person action adventure game for PlayStation2 by Sony Computer Entertainment America for release on January 29th 2001. All elements of Oni final code, packaging, and marketing materials have been approved.

'We are delighted that Oni has been approved by Sony Computer Entertainment America, stated Paul Eibeler, president of Take-Two Interactive. "As PlayStation 2 continues to redefine home entertainment, Oni is poised to become a benchmark in next-generation gaming. The hectic mix of hand-to-hand gunplay and combat was not possible on previous console platforms. When you combine this with the simultaneous release of the versions for PC and Macintosh platforms from the Gathering of Developers I feel that Take-Two is launching a huge new gaming franchise.''

"I'm very excited about this title, the game is outstanding, and consumer anticipation is at fever pitch" said Sam Houser, president of Rockstar Games. "The production and development teams at Bungie and Rockstar Games have done an excellent job getting Oni ready for the for the PlayStation 2. I commend and applaud everyone for their hard work and dedication."

Oni is a third-person 3D action adventure that blends hand-to-hand combat and gunplay into a single action experience. One of the primary goals of Oni is to deliver, for the first time, a third-person game where the action is smooth and instantaneous without being simplistic.

The gameplay is divided 50/50 between hand-to-hand and weapons combat. While Konoko will have an arsenal of weapons at her disposal, from pistols to rocket launchers, realistic quantities and placement of ammo in the environment means that the player won't be able to tear through the game with guns blazing. Instead, Konoko's punches throws and kicks will be critical for attacking silently, saving ammo, and simply enjoying the satisfaction of ``hands-on" punishment.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online      -      Online Users Growl & Purr!
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An update from Don Thomas, pertaining to the recent episode of misleading packaging by games publisher, eGames:

BTW, ...I stopped by Office Depot today. They had a number of eGames products. They all had a statement on the back that "some of the games contained on this disc may be special editions of the originals." It is purposely worded to downplay the truth, but at least they disclose in advance that these "may" not be the original full versions.

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A-ONE's Headline News  
The Latest in Computer Technology News  
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

### Silicon Valley Surviving Blackouts

High-tech companies in the Silicon Valley reported no major problems from Wednesday's rolling power outages - except for a handful of darkened offices and an opportunity for early lunches.

Most businesses that rely on electricity for manufacturing and other critical systems have backup generators that switch on instantly after power is disrupted, said Michelle Montague-Bruno of the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group.

Hewlett-Packard Co., with 110 sites in the San Francisco Bay area, lost power at two buildings in Mountain View and one in Cupertino. About 400 employees were affected, said spokesman Dave Berman.

The darkened buildings made work difficult, but did not affect critical manufacturing or operations.

' 'This is all office stuff," he said. ' 'A number of things could happen, depending on the outside light and the comfort of the building. People may continue to stay at work or some might have setups where they can work at home."

California cut off power to hundreds of thousands of people Wednesday in the first rolling blackouts imposed during its electricity crisis. The rotating, hourlong blackouts across the northern half of the state were halted in the afternoon but were to resume statewide by evening.

Some buildings at Silicon Graphics Inc.'s Mountain View headquarters went dark just before lunch, said spokeswoman Karen Heimbecker.

' 'The power went out 10 or 15 minutes before lunch, so everyone took lunch 10 to 15 minutes early," she said. ' 'By the time most people got back about an hour and a half later, we were back up. It was kind of a convenient time to have a blackout, I guess."

Cisco Systems Inc., San Jose's largest private employer, was not affected as of mid-afternoon, spokesman Steve Langdon said. He said the Internet



equipment giant has generators ready to protect critical functions, such as its network operations center.

Power also continued to flow into Apple Computer Inc.'s Cupertino headquarters, and officials, speaking during the company's earnings conference call, did not expect any problems given that its operations are scattered around the world.

'We have normal contingency plans as most companies do, and knocking on wood, we don't foresee any problems," said Fred Anderson, Apple's chief financial officer.

Intel Corp. voluntarily dimmed its lights, though it never lost power at its major California campuses in Santa Clara and Folsom, said spokesman Bill Calder.

At Agilent Technologies Inc.'s corporate headquarters in Palo Alto, workers were told that a blackout was possible, though power remained on through the afternoon. As at Intel and elsewhere, power was being conserved.

'Other than dimming lights and trying to conserve, we haven't had any effects," said spokeswoman Michele Drake. 'We're kind of on standby for blackouts at corporate headquarters."

#### Companies, Feds Team To Stop Hackers

Nineteen of the nation's top technology firms - including archrivals Microsoft, Oracle, and IBM - have teamed up with the federal government to catch hackers.

The competitors vowed to share intelligence with each other about product vulnerabilities and hacker trends in order to shore up public confidence in e-commerce and protect the over \$7 billion in business-to-business revenue over the Internet.

'This initiative is done regardless of party or corporate logo," Howard Schmidt, chief security officer at Microsoft Corp., said Tuesday of the new Information Sharing and Analysis Center for Information Technology, or IT-ISAC.

'We will not allow the IT-ISAC to become commercialized," said IBM vice president Todd Gordon.

The companies will have to trust each other, as well as share valuable competitive information with the government. The government will in turn alert the companies to new threats.

'We are sending a strong signal to would-be attackers that we are not going to let you get away with cyberterrorism," said outgoing Commerce Secretary Norman Mineta, who is President-elect Bush's nominee for transportation secretary. 'We stand united."

President Clinton in May 1998 called for more public-private partnerships to protect the critical infrastructure. Similar collectives already exist for electric power, telecommunications and the finance industry.

Incidents such as last February's attacks against Yahoo!, eBay and other

major Web sites as well as frequent reports of credit card thefts and extortion attempts made the group's creation a necessity, company executives said.

They said computer attacks have increased threefold since last year's incidents, but added that reaction would be swifter if such an attack happened today.

"They'd work together to see where they could best stem the attacks," said Allan Schoenberg, spokesman for Internet Security Systems in Atlanta, which will provide a public Web site and analysis for the group at a 24-hour, seven days-a-week crisis center.

Most of the work will be done before an attack occurs, the executives said, likening the collective to a "virtual research university with an emergency room attached to it."

Executives said that cooperation had become essential for their businesses. Government officials lauded the effort as "courageous."

"It is a patriotic move on their part to come together to help preserve the economy and help preserve the national security," said Richard A. Clarke, the president's national security advisor in charge of counterterrorism.

To work together, the companies said they may eventually need some antitrust exemptions and would benefit from a bill in Congress that would exempt any data they shared with the government from freedom-of-information requests.

The IT-ISAC group will join the two other computer response teams funded with taxpayer money, both founded in the late 1980s. The Computer Incident Advisory Capability, run by the Energy Department, and CERT, run by Carnegie Mellon University and funded by the government.

CERT was founded in 1988 after a Cornell graduate student, Robert Tappan Morris, released a computer program that took down much of the fledgling Internet.

The executives stressed that not only large corporations will benefit from Tuesday's announcement, but that thousands of tiny Internet storefronts use the same software - which has the same security holes - and serve the same customers.

"Every one of us either has been or will be attacked in cyberspace," said Mary Ann Davidson, security product manager with database giant Oracle. "A threat against one is truly a threat against all."

#### Librarians Sue U.S. Over Internet Censorship

The American Library Association (ALA) announced its intention Thursday to sue the U.S. over the validity of the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

The Act, signed into law on December 21st, 2000 infringes on First Amendment free-speech rights, says the library association. Under CIPA, libraries and schools are required to install content filters on computers

with Internet access as a condition for receiving U.S. government funding.

The ALA argues that mandating installation of the filters would obstruct rather than promote the purpose of improving public access to information for which the federal funds are intended.

Specifically, the ALA claims that the new filtering rules widen the digital divide rather than narrowing it. The federal funding programs that could be affected include the E-rate program, the Library Services and Technology Act, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The suit is not surprising, David Carney, publisher of TechLaw Journal told the NewsFactor Network. Carney said that many groups have been threatening legal proceedings against the Act for some time, and that organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) have already poked a number of legal holes in the legislation.

The Act has been targeted for being both under- and over-inclusive. Even with filter options turned on, the ALA argues, children will be able to access offensive materials, such as pornography, while legitimate sites will be blocked. According to the ALA, there is no filtering software that "differentiates constitutionally protected speech from illegal speech on the Internet."

In 1998, that argument was successfully upheld in Loudon, Virginia, a suburb of Washington, D.C.

The Loudon County Library Internet Policy required that a content filter be used on all library computers with Internet access. Parents' groups and individuals, however, fought for the right to choose what they and their children viewed.

"The legal argument hinged on the First Amendment," said Larry Ottinger, senior staff attorney at People for the American Way, the civil rights group who defended the library patrons.

Ottinger told NewsFactor that "the filters blocked so much constitutionally protected material that had absolutely nothing to do with pornography or anything like that."

Examples of sites blocked by the filters included the graduate school of biology at Yale University, a Quaker Web site, Have An Affair Catering, and a beanie babies site. In addition, sex education and gay and lesbian sites were out of reach. At the same time, materials that should have been blocked were not. The court struck down the library's Internet policy.

"Basically, a filtering company or product doesn't try to block only illegal materials, but they try to block a much larger category of materials that they think people may not want," Ottinger said.

Before materials are banned, Ottinger adds, they normally have to go through a legal procedure in which a court would determine whether or not something is obscene or harmful to minors. "You can't automate that. A machine can't do that. It should be voluntary," Ottinger said.

Other arguments raised by opponents of CIPA include the contention that the right to free speech of those posting the offending material is being violated.

"A completely different argument being advanced by some people is that

what you have here is an unfunded mandate," TechLaw's Carney said. "The [U.S.] government tells state and local entities that you have to go and do something, but the federal government does not give the state the money to do that."

In other words, filtering software providers are not giving their product away for free, but cash-strapped libraries and school districts have to purchase it.

In Loudon, Virginia, the library board adopted an optional policy whereby an adult or parent can use a filter purchased by the library if they choose to do so -- but using a filter is not obligatory.

#### Melissa Virus On The Mac

It appears that the infamous Microsoft Word Macro virus known as Melissa may now be a threat to the Mac. Symantec and McAfee, the two major suppliers of Mac antivirus software, have both confirmed that a new strain of the virus has the potential to infect users of Microsoft's Office 2001 software for the Mac.

Symantec, developer of Norton Antivirus, said it expects to have a fix for MelissaW by Friday. The software can already detect the virus, said Symantec group product manager David Loomstein, but NAV cannot eliminate it until the fix is available.

Loomstein recommended that users delete any suspicious e-mail before opening it. The document reportedly has a subject reading "Important Message From (person's name)," with the text "Here is the document you asked for .. don't show anyone else ;-)" in the body. The message includes a file enclosure called Anniv.DOC, or a variant.

Application service provider Messagelabs.com reported the existence of the virus, which appears to have started in the U.K., with one report coming in from South Africa as well.

McAfee.com has updated its Virus Information Library with information about the new Melissa strain.

#### Kmart's BlueLight.com to Charge Some for Web Access

The chief executive of Kmart Corp.'s online commerce arm <http://www.BlueLight.com> on Tuesday said the company would continue to offer free Internet access service to some subscribers, but also plans to start charging users who stay online more than a certain number of hours each month.

Mark Goldstein, after speaking at the National Retail Federation's annual conference in New York, told Reuters that BlueLight.com, which had previously offered free unlimited Internet access to all subscribers will now offer users "tiers" of access -- free and pay-for service.

Goldstein did not indicate how much the pay-for service would cost nor how many hours non-paying subscribers would be able to stay online. He said

those details still remain to be hashed out and will be announced within the next 30 days.

In December, BlueLight.com was forced to take over the Internet access service after its partner, Spinway Inc., shut down. Since then, the retailer has amassed 20 internal staff members who control the access service and have been working to make it a more cost-efficient venture.

Since then, BlueLight has put restrictions on the number of hours users could stay online in order to contain communications costs. Previously, Spinway had offset the costs of providing the free service with online advertising deals.

Although Goldstein said initially that BlueLight.com, a joint venture also backed by Japan's Softbank Corp., was impacted by additional costs associated with taking on responsibility for the Web access service, the company has since reduced those costs from more than \$4 per user per month to about \$1 per user per month.

"We just run it differently," Goldstein said. "We didn't really care about the advertising, so we just started optimizing the service."

On Dec. 22, BlueLight.com began allowing its subscribers to stay online no more than 25 hours per month, shutting out the heaviest surfers from what has been billed as the fastest-growing Internet service in the United States. Since the service was launched in December 1999, it has signed up more than six million subscribers.

The company said the average user of its Internet service stayed online for about 15 hours per month, but a small number were staying online for more than 25 hours. These users, however, did not tend to be BlueLight's target customer, according to Goldstein.

"Basically, there were three types of people -- pornography seekers, gamers and small business owners that for some reason were 60 percent of our traffic," Goldstein said, adding that its prime target is 30- to 40-year-old mothers who are going to shop BlueLight.com.

"The point was that, if we were going to let these people stay on the Internet 24 hours a day and do what they do, then they have to pay," he added. "So we've asked them to graduate, which was our polite word."

Over the holidays, BlueLight.com boasted a 1,060-percent improvement in online sales over last year when Kmart ran its <http://www.Kmart.com> shopping site. BlueLight did not release sales figures, however. On Tuesday, Goldstein said the site now expects to do more than \$100 million in sales over the course of this year.

Still, taking into consideration the slowdown in retail spending over the past year Goldstein said he did not rule out the impact an overall economic slowdown might have on BlueLight.com's performance.

"The Kmart, Wal-Mart and Targets are less impacted by a slowdown than say a Neimans or a Saks," he said. "So, from a relative perspective maybe people will shop Kmart more, but it is going to impact all of us."

"Again we're starting at such a low base that I can't really measure what the impact will be," Goldstein said.

## eBay Rankles Users with Fee Increase

Internet auction giant eBay incurred the wrath of many of its members Tuesday by announcing that it will hike its listing fees at the end of January.

The announcement came one week after Yahoo! Auctions began charging listing fees, and in advance of eBay's fourth quarter earnings announcement, scheduled to come after the stock market closes Thursday. Analysts are expecting a profit of 7 cents for the quarter.

The fee increases, which take effect January 31st, are the company's first since December of 1996, eBay told users. The fee increases will also apply to items listed on eBay Canada in U.S. dollars.

"We recognize that price increases directly impact our sellers," eBay said. "We will continue to build a vibrant marketplace by investing heavily in technology, marketing and customer support."

Users of eBay were quick to denounce the move on Web message boards, but few said they would stop using eBay, which attracts far more buyers than competitive sites such as those run by Yahoo! and Amazon.com.

However, many eBay users were already disgruntled over eBay's announcement in late December that it would step up enforcement of policies restricting its members from conducting off-site sales with each other.

In its note to users, eBay noted the need to continually improve the technology of its site, a fact driven home by a 10-hour outage the company suffered on January 3rd.

At the time, the company said it had postponed a planned upgrade until after the holidays and that additional work would be done to avoid future problems.

The increases will vary depending upon the price of the item being listed, with the largest hikes -- as much as 65 percent -- being tacked onto high-end auctions.

For instance, the insertion fee for an item worth between US\$10 and \$25 will increase from 50 to 55 cents, while the fee for items worth \$200 or more will move from \$2 to \$3.30. The company is also instituting a 10 cent fee for the option of holding an auction open for 10 days.

While some users may initially leave eBay for other auction sites that charge lower fees, "the overwhelming majority will continue to list through eBay," said Derek Brown, an analyst with W.R. Hambrecht & Co.

Indeed, most analysts applauded the move by eBay, one of the few profitable e-commerce companies, with several saying the fees could boost revenue by 5 percent and add up to 6 cents per share in earnings during the coming year.

"This price increase is a powerful indicator of the health of eBay's franchise," Brown said.

In addition to being upbeat about the future, Brown is also bullish on eBay's current performance, saying the annual "January effect" boosting

the site's traffic seems to be stronger this year than before.

"The company's performance and outlook should serve as beacons of light for technology investors in these challenging times," he added.

The fees are likely to change eBay, at least at first. Many users seem prepared to lower reserve prices to avoid higher fees, a move that may increase the rate of sales on the site.

Users may also think twice before listing some items, which may help to address recent complaints, primarily from other sellers, that too many items are appearing for sale.

Some users speculated that the 10-day auction fee would bring more traffic to eBay on Sundays. Sellers often list items so that auctions end on Sunday, giving the item as much weekend exposure as possible. Rather than pay the 10-day fee, many sellers said they would start auctions on Sunday instead, possibly leading to heavier traffic on that day.

#### Hotmail Trashes Users' E-mail

Microsoft defends its aggressive efforts to curb spam, even when it means filtering messages sent by ordinary Hotmail users.

Ben Johnson has been sending e-mail for months from his Hotmail account. But he just discovered that some of his messages were diverted to the trash before arriving at their destination.

Johnson, 24, is among the millions of customers caught in the crossfire of a battle over spam. For at least five months, some Hotmail customers' outgoing mail has been blocked.

In an apparently overzealous attempt to prevent spam, Microsoft's Hotmail has been discarding e-mail sent to and from sites hosted by controversial Internet service providers--even if the sites themselves were not controversial.

What's more, Hotmail didn't tell people that some outgoing mail was being discarded. Instead, it said the error was because of a problem connecting to the recipient--a practice that has particularly alarmed some customers.

"If Microsoft, one of the largest technology companies, can say who we send e-mail to, that really puts constraints on freedom of speech in the U.S.," said Johnson, an information technology worker at a major Illinois hospital.

Microsoft defended its actions, saying it's only trying to prevent spam.

"MSN has been very aggressive and proactive in protecting our MSN Hotmail users from spam," Sarah Lefko, MSN product manager, said in an e-mail, noting that the company will review blocked sites on a case-by-case basis if a complaint is filed.

The quagmire illustrates the challenges of trying to prevent spam while preserving free speech. After all, no one wants an in-box crammed with unsolicited porn and bogus plans to work from home for millions of dollars. E-mail services are struggling to find a fair way to prevent that

from happening.

Still, to subscribers such as Johnson, the practice of blocking outgoing mail is extreme.

"It's like killing a fly with a shotgun," he said.

The controversy stems from Hotmail's membership in the Mail Abuse Prevention System (MAPS), an organization formed to crack down on spam. MAPS is the keeper of the Realtime Blackhole List (RBL), a list of ISPs known to host some major spammers.

However, many of those ISPs also host sites that don't send spam, and those sites often are blocked, too. MAPS hopes the practice will convince legitimate sites to abandon hosts that cater to spammers.

For example, ISP Media3 Technologies is listed on the RBL because it hosts half a dozen spammers. However, it also hosts sites such as Peacefire.org, which alerted members this week that Hotmail users have been unable to reach it for five months.

After Peacefire protested, mail to the organization was allowed to continue earlier this week.

Other companies besides Hotmail also may be blocking outgoing mail, but because they don't always notify customers, it's difficult to determine whether it's happening unless someone complains.

When a company signs onto MAPS, it has several options to control spam. It can use a method that compares each incoming message with a list of ISPs on the RBL. Or it can choose another, more sweeping approach that blocks e-mail, both incoming and outgoing, at the network borders. Companies also can tailor their systems to block only certain sites or just incoming mail. Hotmail apparently chose the most restrictive method.

Kelly Thompson, MAPS' RBL project manager, said most companies choose the least severe technique. Thompson acknowledged that blocking outgoing mail might be a little extreme, but given the huge load of spam that major services such as Hotmail must deal with, "they have the right to be as strict as they want."

The idea behind blocking outgoing mail is to ensure that people don't reply to spammers, who often offer recipients a fake option of unsubscribing from their list. Instead of removing people, spammers use the incoming messages as a signal that an e-mail address is an active one where they can send more spam.

Still, Web-based e-mail users are angry.

Kyle McCowin, a 21-year-old student, first learned of the blocks when he was alerted by Peacefire earlier this week. He said he could understand blocking incoming mail, but the move to block outgoing mail disturbed him.

"I was caught completely by surprise," he said. "As far as I'm concerned, there's no need to block outgoing mail."

McCowin also wishes Hotmail had made it more clear that it was discarding some of the messages he sent. "They just sort of pocket the e-mail and don't even tell you about it," he said.



Microsoft ran into a similar spam-related problem three years ago when it tried to block unwanted e-mails by filtering out incoming messages from Outlook 98 that contained certain phrases or grammar, such as a string of exclamation points or the words "for free." As a result, many people found that they never received messages from friends who were fond of multiple punctuation marks.

MAPS already has stirred plenty of controversy in its attempt to balance free speech rights with spam control. In August, the organization was sued by Harris Interactive, which claimed it was being unjustly blocked. The suit was later dismissed. ISPs Exactis and Media3, which hosts Peacefire, have filed similar suits. Media3 lost the first round in its court battle Jan. 2, when a federal judge in Boston denied the company's request to be taken off the list.

#### AOL, Nokia Strike Pact to Make Wireless Browser

AOL Time Warner Inc. said on Thursday it struck a licensing pact with Nokia Corp., marking the media conglomerate's first foray into microbrowsers, which provide wireless Web access.

Under the multiyear agreement, the AOL unit of newly merged AOL Time Warner will develop and market a Netscape-branded version of Nokia's WAP (wireless application protocol) browser. The Finnish telecommunications equipment maker's browser can be used to access the Web through a variety of wireless communications devices.

Terms of the deal were not disclosed.

"WAP is the most widely adopted wireless standard in the world among carriers and handset manufacturers and it makes sense for us to work to support that standard," Dennis Patrick, president of AOL Wireless, said in a statement. "Licensing their WAP browser source code allows us to quickly enter the WAP market with an established technology."

The move is yet another step in the company's AOL Anywhere strategy that aims to make its services available on devices beyond the personal computer and aims to get a share of the growing wireless population.

An AOL spokesman said there was no disclosed timeline for implementing the product and that in coming months the company will see how the Netscape-branded browser is integrated and used with other manufacturers.

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